

Critical Self-Reflection: A Means to Instigate a Culinary Education Revolution

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Just like my own first days polytechnic, the task of chopping and cooking vegetables to a prescribed standard is fairly normal occurrence within the classical hierarchical French culinary curriculum. Michael Ruhlman talks of being presented on his first day in the CIA culinary kitchen with a prep list of mirepoix, tomato concasse and minced onion (Ruhlman, 1997, p. 6). For me, it was cutting carrots into brunoise shaped vegetables, with the trim being placed aside for utilization in a ‘fond brun’ or brown stock.

The day started out like many other sessions would. The morning was spent with a theory lesson lead by the cheflecturer going through the classical vegetable cuts. We were instructed that this learning was part of the entremetier section of the kitchen and that the skills learnt were the foundations of other more technical dishes that we would learn in the future. That morning there was also a basic instruction on how to prepare a stock. This learning included an introduction into its ingredients and terms such as mirepoix and bouquet garni. We were then informed that these stocks were to be the basis of many sauces and, with time, advanced technical soups such as consommés.

After the theory lesson was completed we would enter the kitchen for a practical demonstration led by our lecturer before we were allowed to undertake the task ourselves. The practical demonstration commenced with my lecturer explaining why we were undertaking the task in such a set way.

Firstly, we were instructed that to be a good chef we needed to learn to master the knife. Our lecturer explained that as a chef we would be expected to chop vegetables at a quick speed as ‘time is money in the restaurant industry’. We were then instructed that upon mastering the cut we could utilize it in a potage and later in the year for a consommé brunoise. It was made clear to us that mastering this skill was important as we would be assessed on the production of both soups in the future. Our lecturer then proceeded to wash, peel and rewash the carrot.

My lecturer took his knife and with its precision slowly transformed this once cylindrical carrot into a mound of perfect small dice. The trim was to be placed into a bowl and to be used for stock; as my lecturer explained ‘you wouldn’t throw twenty cents into the rubbish bin, so we waste nothing in a kitchen’.

The above personal vignette is a platform for introducing two underlying themes within this critical enquiry. The first of these is the power of the lived experience to inform new forms of knowledge and secondly, the role of the teacher and the potential hidden curriculum of Western culinary arts education. Through the adoption of the interpretist research paradigm, I intend to develop illuminating insights into culinary arts pedagogy that are not facilitated by more conventional enquiry practices (Robinson et al., 2014).

Challenging the traditional pedagogies of western culinary arts education

The opening vignette describes the learning framework which would form the basis of my formal culinary education. It is a pedagogical model that has primarily been based upon the master-apprentice framework and the hierarchical structures developed by Auguste Escoffier at the turn of the Twentieth Century (Cullen, 2012; Deutsch, 2014; Mitchell et al., 2013). In most parts of the world, the formalised culinary curriculum is still arranged around the content and structure of Escoffier’s 1903 book *Le Guide Culinaire* (Deutsch, 2014). Just as in my own story, today it is still common practice for a culinary student to start their education with simple vegetable preparation before transitioning to more technical tasks such as meat production and cooking, in accordance with Escoffier’s book (Deutsch, 2014).

In the last two decades critical questions have been raised pertaining to the implications of master-apprentice pedagogies and the role of a classical curriculum (Deutsch, 2014; Hegarty, 2011; Mitchell, Woodhouse, Heptinstall, & Camp, 2013; Sherlock & Williamson, 2014). Culinary arts lecturer Jonathan Deutsch (2014) from Drexel University, Philadelphia (USA) question the dominant culinary pedagogy of master–apprentice, learning through demonstration and replication. This methodology involves a ‘recipe-based pedagogy’ where the chef teacher demonstrates a dish and the student replicates it for the lecturer’s approval. Deutsch claims that traditional culinary arts education devalues the individual and, in turn, their creative thinking process. The lack of questioning of the conformed modes of practice inhibits a student’s ability to become better prepared for the challenges they will face when having to think innovatively within the industry.

Supporting calls for pedagogical change is academic Joseph Hegarty (retired). Hegarty’s scholarly position echoes that of others within the wider tourism and hospitality

community (Ateljevic, Morgan, & Pritchard, 2013; Fullagar & Wilson, 2012; Tribe, 2002) and calls for higher education to emancipate itself of traditional universal truths and power structures, and to rethink how we know what we know. Central to this liberation is critical reflexivity through reflective practice for both the teacher and the student.

The lived experience as a legitimate form of knowledge creation

At the heart of this enquiry is the opening vignette. A personal account of my own culinary education and one from which I can reflect on and gain new personal and professional insights. This work follows a movement within the tourism and hospitality academy which now sees the questioning of fundamental ways in which knowledge truths are constructed by the academy (Ateljevic et al., 2013; Fullagar & Wilson, 2012; Tribe, 2002). With hospitality deeply entrenched within the human experience, there has been a growing critical turn (Ateljevic, Harris, Wilson, & Collins, 2005) which embraces knowledge created from the social sciences and its interpretive, alternative and critical modes of enquiry (Wilson, Harris, & Small, 2008). Fullagar proposes that for hospitality, multiple ways of engaging in disciplinary truths are needed, as hospitality sector remains 'unreflexive about their own power-knowledge relations' (Fullagar & Wilson, 2012, p. 1).

Likewise from the culinary sector, Hegarty (2011) calls for culinary educators to become reflective ethnographers in the quest for excellence. According to Hegarty (2011), reflecting critically on one's lived experience is a fundamental cornerstone for culinary excellence and lifelong learning. Hegarty proposes that to lift culinary arts beyond being a craft, educators and students need to become reflective practitioners by studying their situations with a view of improving the quality actions within them. According to Hegarty, fundamental to this pedagogical transformation is that the 'traditional mindset within the culinary schools' will need to change. To effect these changes, Hegarty proposes that culinary educators need to apply self-analysis tools to question their own practices within their context (2011).

As such, this critical enquiry utilises reflective storytelling as a means of self-critical examination and thus a professional awakening. The power of reflective storytelling is not new in higher education, and has long been associated with the construction of new knowledge and, in turn, new identity for learners (Alterio & McDrury, 2003; Durrance, 1997; Haigh & Hardy, 2011; Jenny Moon & Fowler, 2008; Sobol, Gentile, & Sunwolf, 2004).

Critical perspectives of education beyond the culinary arts

While the last two decades have seen critical calls for change within culinary arts and its wider community, the critical questioning of the control of knowledge in society

and its associated power is not new. Since the time of the early Greek philosophers, education and power have been intertwined themes (Nussbaum & Long, 1988).

In the last forty years, critical theorists have begun to challenge our educational discourse and its function in shaping the structures of our societies and the identities which exist within it. The 1970's saw the emergence of critical pedagogy as a social movement that embraces both education and critical theory (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). A fundamental role of critical theory is to challenge the ways in which schools and their educational offerings impact on the social, cultural and political lives of their students (21st Century Schools, N.D.). Within this movement sits a group of critical education theorists including Michael Apple (1982), Paulo Freire (1970), bell hooks (2014), Jacques Derrida (1978) and Ivan Illich (1971) who questioned education and its impact on the socially marginalized. As an early pioneer of the critical theory movement Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire (1970) wrote the seminal text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which fundamentally challenged education and its role in perpetuating dominant cultural ideologies.

Paulo Freire: knowledge banking, cultural invasion and identity formation

Freire's work has commenced a critical conversation about the power relationships between teachers and students and the associated dehumanizing processes that are still on-going today (Darder, 2014). Freire proposes that critical education can be a means to engage learners in a praxis of learning that liberates them from the conformity of their world: 'Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it' (Freire, 1970, p. 60).

In particular Freire is critical of the learning environments in which knowledge banking is performed (Freire, 1970). The knowledge banking learning framework occurs when students are seen solely as vessels into which knowledge from teachers can be deposited (Freire, 1970). According to Freire the role of the teacher in this learning relationship is that of the 'oppressor' and their role is to transform the minds of the students to the teacher's dominant ideologies. He continues to explain that creating a learning environment in which people become passive and adaptive to the views of the dominant ideologies, results in the oppressors emerging as the sole benefactors (Freire, 1970). To this end 'the oppressed, whose tranquility rests on how well people fit the world the oppressors have created, and how little they question it' (Freire, 1970, p. 57).

Instead, Freire proposes that students problematise their own lives in order to realise that they can achieve a different status. He suggests that both teacher and student need to engage in meaningful critical conversations within a problematised learning framework, with both sharing an

equal voice. For Freire, it should not be that the teacher is doing all of the dialogue, as this would be knowledge banking, rather both acting together in a mutual dialogue. Democracy and respect between teacher and learner are fundamental to dialogical learning and that mutual dialogue is an essential component of this.

Freire suggests that within these oppressive learning environments students do not think critically about their conditions. As such they become acquiescent to existing practices and conditions of the times, rather than constructing new means of critical thought to improve theirs and others lives. He proposes that individuals should form their own identities rather than have their identities formed for them. In this instance, identity formation is 'antidialogical' and is an act of cultural invasion. Accordingly 'cultural conquest leads to the cultural inauthenticity of those who are invaded; they begin to respond to the values, the standards, and the goals of the invaders' (1970, p. 122). However he continues that for cultural invasion to succeed, it is essential for the oppressed learner to be convinced of their inferiority.

Now let's take this simple task of a student cutting a carrot into the classic French brunoise cut as a case study that we can critically examine from a knowledge and power perspective. What are the critical implications for what appears at first to be a learning activity with the best intent?

The hidden curriculum of culinary arts education

As a teaching strategy, the stair-casing of knowledge from brunoise cut to potage (a basic soup) to consommé brunoise has pedagogical value (Hodson & Hodson, 1998). Likewise, from an industry perspective, chefs are still required to cut vegetables into small pieces for such actions as sauté, salsa sauces and garnish. It is therefore without question that the skill of precise cutting is a fundamental component in haute cuisine. Likewise, the ability to slice fish for sashimi in Japanese cuisine is considered an art form. Like potage, we also see within the different cultures of the world many examples of mankind's ability to flavour liquids to form a multitude of gastronomic creations; tom yum (Thailand), avgolemono (Greece) and gazpacho (Spain) are all examples of this. Even as a young chef I was required to make a different soup each day from the offerings in the chiller, but would struggle as the classical repertoire taught to me at polytechnic only contained twelve soups.

It is through the action of being instructed to learn to prepare a brunoise that we can see the principles of knowledge banking and the adherence to the ideologies of the French repertoire present (Freire, 1970). According to Freire (1970), the action of knowledge banking is an act of cultural invasion as the ideologies of the French repertoire and approach to technique are being forced upon the student. Primarily, I was being asked to learn the skill of cutting a brunoise because at some predetermined time I would be assessed against it. Could I cut vegetables to an

industry standard? Yes I could, because I was working in a hotel where I prepared up to ten different salads a day. I was operating within a different knowledge framework from my lecturers. I was now operating between different fields of play (Bourdieu, 1984) and the doxa, or rules, were different for each. As a trainee chef I was constantly moving between my Institute's and my workplace's perception of legitimate and illegitimate forms of knowledge.

At the Shoreline Hotel where I worked as a commi chef we used a mandolin slicer to cut our vegetables as we would prepare twenty litre buckets of carrots for the vegetable of the day. They weren't perfect in size but the customers were more focused on value for money from food as opposed to precision and artistic expression. Freire (1970) would also describe this type of learning environment as anti-dialectic as the lecturer is doing the majority of the talking. While there is a physical silence in the classroom, there is also a hidden silence, because as students we would not challenge the knowledge of our lecturer. For Freire, when there is not the presence of equal dialogue between the lecturer and the student there is not a democratic learning process happening. The lecturer had taken the role of the master of knowledge and now, due to his dominant role in the formation of knowledge, the students have entered into a code of silence. While this could be put down to first day nerves amongst the students, there was certainly no questioning the lecturer as to why we were undertaking such a task. As Deutsch (2014) would say, we were being indoctrinated into not questioning or challenging the ultimate knowledge or authority of our master. We were now learning to say 'oui chef' and not 'why chef'. As New Zealand chef Ben Shewry (2012, p. 86) attests in his own culinary education:

There was no place for creativity, poetic license, individuality or freedom...very much like the military. When you address me you call me Chef. When I bark orders at you, you respond, 'chef, *oui chef*'.

While I believe that my teachers were working in what they perceived to be the best interests of the students, Freire (1970) would propose that the consequence of their actions was the indoctrination of their dominant cultural ideologies onto us the students.

Likewise for students to have their knowledge legitimatised they must submit their practices to the culinary culture and ideologies of the French and, as Freire (1970) proposes, this is an act of cultural invasion.

Impact on identity formation

I now ask the critical question; was my identity predetermined before I entered the kitchen? Fine (2008) proposes that the organisational tasks that are delegated to chefs have a significant influence on the chef's own sense of identity of themselves; as such chefs working identities are socially constructed in the workplace that they operate within.

According to Fine, depending upon the allocations of these tasks, a chef can see themselves as an artist, a business person, a professional, a labourer or a blend of these (Fine, 2008). For Fine, the organization is a factor in the formation of identity through the tasks allocated within it. Therefore a chef in a fine dining restaurant who prepares basic vegetables can view themselves as a labourer because they do a manual job, while a cook in a school canteen can perceive themselves as an artist because they have the power to present the food as they wish. It is through the actions within our workplaces that our identity can be formed. The classical French brigade system has resulted in such identities, with apprentices as labourers, senior chefs as professionals and Chef de Cuisines as artists and/or business people.

Looking back at my first task at polytechnic (brunoise of carrot) it could be argued that my identity was predetermined as that of a labourer. The speed at which I could cut the carrot would determine how fast I could get the job done and therefore create efficiencies for the business, and my ability to utilize the trim would help me make money for them. However, as Fine (2008) would propose, many chefs view the preparation of food as artistic expression. It could be argued that I was being socially stratified to the role of worker by the well-meaning comments of my lecturer.

These personal comments from lecturers give us an insight into how they perceive students' culinary identities. In this situation I believe my access to culinary knowledge was for the purposes of a predetermined social identity, one determined by the working 'fields' and cultural 'habitus' of my lecturer. But what happens to those students who wish to acquire culinary knowledge not for the purposes of working in the industry; those who chose to learn for their own needs? I now propose that the working and financial needs of the hospitality industry are seen as the major benefactors of formalised culinary education.

What of those students in my class who saw culinary arts as a true form of artistic expression? To assume the identity of an artist would have meant that the power of knowledge would need to be released from my lecturer and assigned to the learner. It would have been 'take this carrot and create with it what you want'. To take such a position means that the lecturer would have to engage in a democratic dialogue and to submit to the notion that the student brings a level of culinary and life knowledge to the classroom. As an experienced lecturer I can testify that all students have such knowledge and it is just as varied as each of us are.

Further philosophical questions

Through the adoption of reflexivity as a form of new knowledge creation, this work now shines the light on the role of the culinary teacher and their potential impact on culinary identity formation.

Within the hidden curriculum there are pedagogical approaches and teaching activities which can potentially

reflect the teacher's own personal culinary values in relation to knowledge creation and student culinary identity. I now propose that the relationship between teaching methodology and knowledge creation can be a factor in the formation of a student's culinary identity. To return to the carrot, the task of cutting this humble vegetable can be the action of a labourer, an artist or a professional, but this culinary identity is influenced by the words and actions of the teacher and their view of the professional practice. Perpetuating this situation is the fact that students have been socially conditioned to accept that their culinary teachers are the universal source of knowledge and their practice is not to be questioned (Illich, 1971).

As an emerging higher education discipline, culinary arts pedagogy and its critical dialogue is still in its infancy. Some may suggest that the challenge of transformational change is too great for the culinary arts community; the inertia of kitchen hierarchy and master-apprentice pedagogies is too powerful. However we need only look to medicine and McMaster University in 1969 as inspiration for change. In 1969 McMaster University radically transformed global medical education by abandoning the structured and directed curriculum and adopting a problem based learning (PBL) environment. Through PBL, McMaster University medical students develop a deeper level of learning whilst acquiring transferable life skills (Lee & Kwan, 1997). McMaster University has been described as a 'trail blazer' in medical education and its approach to teaching and learning has been adopted by multiple medical institutes across the globe (Lee & Kwan, 1997).

The last century has seen Auguste Escoffier, Paul Bocuse and Ferran Adrià reflect and think critically about their practices and make radical changes to them. With the current hierarchical kitchen structures and a supporting culinary education system which perpetuates the culture of not questioning the status quo, we are facing a future where chefs of this ilk will be the exception and not the norm.

The wheels of change may turn slowly for the culinary arts teaching community, however a paradigm shift in knowledge construction by culinary arts educators could redefine what it means to study and learn to 'be a chef'. This paradigm shift will mean that critically reflective chefs who challenge the hegemonic practices and offerings of their times may become the norm and not the exception. Like Escoffier, Bocuse and Adrià, I now suggest that culinary arts educators embrace critical reflectivity as a means of pedagogical transformation and to radically rethink the future landscape of culinary arts education. However I suspect the greatest challenge to culinary education may in fact rest with the teachers themselves.

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